



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Mitt Romney, Governor ♦ Kerry Healey, Lt. Governor ♦ Jane Wallis Gumble, Director

## **ELECTRONIC APPLICATION TRAINING**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED HAP QUESTIONS**

- Q 1. Once application is printed, what do we do? Do we have to wait for the verification information to come to the LHA and is this to be received within a 14 day period?**

#### **POLICY CHANGE**

At the training sessions for the VG E-Application Pilot Program, LHAs were instructed to log any applicant who is requesting emergency status (priority 1-4), as of the date and time the e-application was received. The applicant would then have up to 14 calendar days to get the verification to the HAP provider. The HAP provider then would have 3 business days to get the verification documents to the LHAs where the applicant applied. If the above time frames were met, then the applicant's date of emergency priority status would be the date of the original on-line submission.

Due to numerous concerns regarding the fairness of this policy in relation to homeless applicants not in this Pilot Program, we are changing this policy to make it consistent with existing tenant selection procedures. **All e-applications submitted to LHAs will be entered into the Master File Ledger as standard applications, as of the date the e-application is received, regardless of whether or not the applicant has indicated homelessness. The control number must also be recorded in the VG system.**

When the LHA receives all supporting documentation and verification of priority status a new control number must be assigned, as of the date of receipt, to the application, recorded in the LHAs Master File Ledger and in the VG system. In the VG system, the LHA can search for the application via the VG number and/or the original standard control number. Once the LHA determines the applicant eligible for priority status, the new control number will be recorded in the appropriate bedroom size Waiting List Ledger.

**Q 2. Is the Virtual Gateway Sapphire?**

No, the Virtual Gateway is a Pilot program for 25 staff members from 12 Housing Assistance Providers (HAPs) testing the electronic-applications to state-aided family public housing only.

**Q 3. If they never submit their emergency verification, the LHA is to determine their eligibility or ineligibility status as a standard applicant, but the LHA's waiting list is only open for emergency applications. How is this handled and will the system drop them automatically?**

No, the Virtual Gateway E-application Pilot requires the LHA to send a letter of ineligibility or eligibility to the applicant just like the existing system. When an LHA's waiting list is only open to homeless priority applicants, the LHA should send back the application to the applicant with a letter stating the applicant is ineligible for priority status because verifications were not received and informing the applicant of the appeal rights, as well as informing them that the LHA's wait list is not open to standard applicants.

**Q 4. Each LHA may screen applications for emergency status differently. What happens when an applicant has been determined eligible at one LHA and ineligible at another? Do you expect us to call each one and ask why they were deemed eligible or ineligible?**

Determination of eligibility, qualification, and priority preference status is determined by each LHA in accordance with DHCD regulations, as it is done currently. The difference with the e-application is that the applicant is given a list (Next Steps) of the types of documents that an LHA will accept as verification. HAPs were told during the training that each LHA has the right to make its own determination of eligibility and qualification, and it is up to the applicant to prove their eligibility and qualification. They were also told that documents required by each LHA may be different. An example that one of the HAPs raised was whether or not an LHA could require a credit check, even though another one may not. We responded yes. As long as what the LHA is asking for is allowed within the parameters of DHCD's regulations and guidelines they can require a particular type of verification.

It is up to each LHA as to whether or not you want to call other LHAs to discuss why they have made a different determination from the one you have made. There is no requirement to do this.

**Q 5. Can supervisors train other staff and have that person receive a User name/password even if they did not attend the training?**

No, not at this time. Because this is a Pilot, we do not want staff members using the system if they have not received the Virtual Gateway Housing Training. In addition, we want to limit the number of Users to allow for better monitoring. It is possible in the near future that the number of Users will be expanded. This will be done through Carole Collins, DTA and Virtual Gateway.

**Q 6. Do all LHAs have to accept the e-application and if an applicant wants to file a paper application. Do all LHAs have to accept the Universal Application(s)?**

Yes, any LHA with an open waiting list cannot refuse to process either the e-application or the paper Universal Application(s).

**Q 7. Do applications have to have original signatures?**

Original signatures are not required. A photo-copy of the signature affixed to the original document is as valid as the original. This language is contained on the universal and electronic applications.

**Q 8. Can we add to “work number” a field for an extension?**

No. This will be considered as a future enhancement to the system.

**Q 9. Not all shelters have access to computers. A suggestion was to use the public library internet service.**

DTA has agreed to provide computers and internet access at shelters that do not have access now. Providers should contact Barbara Duffy at DTA if they encounter problems.

**Q 10. Will forms be in Spanish/other languages, if not, would they have a translation notice on top?**

Only the FIPA notice will be translated at this time.

**Q 11. Does HAP User have to witness signatures of all adult members on FIPA forms?**

Yes, if HAP User can't witness all adult signatures then another HAP or shelter staff member can, and put N/A for User ID.

**Q 12. If one HAP agency enters information regarding the client, and the client changes shelters and goes to another HAP and they try to enter his/her information, does that information get identified? Can the HAP process application?**

If a new shelter is not a “User” then they have to contact old shelter HAP Provider to track application. If new shelter is a User under Pilot, they may be able to access application if Virtual Gateway allows changes.

**Q 13. Computer Issue: Date Moved In screen under Landlord/Owner screen for current address, when you list your current address as the shelter, the system will not allow entering the current month.**

Virtual Gateway will change this.

**Q 14. Checklist that is given to the applicant lists Social Security Number and Alien Registration Number; does computer let you enter the Alien Registration Number?**

Yes.

**Q 15. Could Virtual Gateway number be printed /stamped as a header on each form/document received by LHA?**

Yes, the electronic summary **when printed** shows the head of household, application number and page number on each page of summary.

**Q 16. How does an applicant file an e-application at an LHA that has a site specific waiting list system?**

Virtual Gateway-E-application system lists development specific status for both Boston and Cambridge H.A (currently the only LHAs with site specific lists). Applicants applying to Boston or Cambridge must select site(s) to which they want to apply. E-application is then sent to Boston and Cambridge H.A.'s inbox for processing.

**Q 17. Provide LHA with a listing of HAP providers, and possible case management staff.**

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**Q 18. Is there a way to delineate eligible for priority vs. standard in the processing status?**

No, this will be done for SAPHIRE. Eligible for e-application refers to eligibility for the program not priority. The definitions of status are contained in the User Guide.

**Q. 19. Does e-applicant keep original submission date for standard applicant even though the FIPA, the Statement of Rights, and the Summary of Application have not been submitted?**

No. The LHA should notify the applicant in writing that the application is incomplete. HAPs were told to submit the required forms for the standard application if the applicant did not provide the supporting verifications of homelessness status.

**Q 20. Possibilities of scanning documents into system to be sent electronically to LHA?**

Not at this time, but we are investigating for SAPHIRE.

**Q 21. Are there any safeguards to guard against multiple/duplicate e-Applications being submitted as participant travels to another HAP?**

DHCD is working on this with Virtual Gateway and DTA to make sure this information is shared. Right now when a participant moves from one HAP to another information is shared by fax or mail. One of the issues we are working on with Virtual Gateway and DTA is to find a way for the new HAP to access the e-application that has already been submitted by the previous HAP. This will eliminate the duplication of another e-application submittal

**Q 22. What if an applicant submits another application after a unit offer refusal?**

If an applicant submits another application after a unit offer refusal the LHA will determine the applicant ineligible for priority or preference status received on the previous application for a period of three years.

**Q 23. The e-application does not state bedroom size on any of the summary documents?**

DHCD is working with Virtual Gateway to have this information included.

**Q 24. Will DHCD be doing a mass mailing repeating instructions to HAP providers and LHAs?**

No, User Manuals for both the HAP providers and LHAs are on line at Virtual Gateway Housing Application and on DHCD's web page, there is also the Virtual Gateway Help Desk, 1-800-421-0938. HAP providers and LHAs will be notified of the go live date of the e-application through the Virtual Gateway.

- Q 25. There needs to be two additional standard buttons under the “Application/Inquiry Status”: (1) Standard; no verifications forthcoming and (2) Standard; not eligible for homeless status.**

Status currently, has nothing to do with priority status. Status indicates whether or not applicant is eligible or qualified for program. Please refer to the definitions provided in the User Guide. The eligibility letter sent out by the LHA informs applicant of priority and preference status, and their appeal rights.

- Q 26. Could the LHA change the status from Submitted to Received without printing the Summary Application? LHAs will receive in the mail a copy of the signed E-application Summary. It is duplication and it is too much paper.**

This is the manner in which the existing system is set-up for other Virtual Gateway Inbox Users. An action had to be built in to the system to trigger the automatic change from Submitted to Received in the Inbox. In addition, by printing the application it provides the Intake person with a piece of paper reminding him/her that a Control Number needs to be issued and the e-application needs to be logged in to the Master Ledger File. Once the signed E-application Summary is received the LHA can either keep or discard the one they printed.

- Q 27. Why sign application request, on every page if penalty of perjury already signed?**

Important that applicant and HAP know what they reviewed is what was submitted.

- Q 28. Can LHAs access the Virtual Gateway if computer is a Macintosh?**

It should work fine as long as the User is using an “Internet Explorer” or “Netscape” browser to access the application. The actual computer should not matter. See the browser compatibility information on the before you begin page.

- Q 29. At certain LHAs, a control number is not issued until the CORI is completed, therefore, the e-applicant submittal date cannot apply. How is CORI accomplished from a remote location, as there is a requirement to have a picture identification?**

CORI is not part of application. CORI law states that LHAs (not HAPs) obtain CORI when applicant is close to the top of the waiting list. In addition, the LHA needs to have the most current information.